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AUTHOR Gavin, Eileen A.
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ABSTRACT

Social and historical perspectives on academic women in the United States are considered. Progress of academic women during the past decade, factors associated with scholarly achievement, and prospects for the 1980s are examined. Women's entry into higher education, first as students and later as faculty members, began quite recently. At about the time that teaching became a realistic career option for women, degree-granting women's colleges were established. Some of these emphasized education to support the traditional homemaker role, while others sought to develop women's intelligence. After women graduated from baccalaureate programs, some chose to enter graduate studies, and the majority of those attaining doctorates entered academic careers. From 1969 to 1980 the percentage of women faculty in colleges and universities increased from 19 percent to 26 percent. Throughout the 1970s the majority of women faculty members served at two-year and four-year colleges, were found more frequently than men at lower academic ranks, and received lower salaries than men. Research findings concerning levels of self-esteem held by professional women and educated homemakers are considered, along with findings regarding sources of personal support that have been associated with becoming academic women, appropriate inclusion of women in expressions of language, and continued efforts to eliminate factors that curtail the development of women's talents and contributions to higher education. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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Academic Women in the 1970's, with Implications for the 1980's

Eileen A. Gavin
The College of St. Catherine

This paper will present a social and historical perspective on academic women in the United States. It will detail progress of academic women during the past decade, factors associated with scholarly achievement, and prospects for the 1980's.

In the United States, women began to enter higher education, first as students, later as faculty members, quite recently. Two hundred years elapsed from the time Harvard opened until Oberlin in 1837 became the first college in the United States that admitted women students. (Graham, 1970, p. 1284) More colleges and universities began to enroll women later in the nineteenth century, especially after the War Between the North and South. Many colleges that accepted women students relatively early were influenced by the need for funds that tuition from additional students would help to supply. (Graham, 1970, p. 1284) Such colleges typically had slim financial endowments and tended to be situated west of the Allegheny Mountains.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, a number of non-degree programs devoted to teacher training welcomed women students. Teaching provided an alternative to a rather limited array of jobs available to women in factories and domestic settings. It served a need, was seen as a preparation for motherhood (Strober & Tyack, 1980, p. 496) and thus supported the prevailing stereotype of women's role.

At about the time that teaching became a realistic career option for women, degree-granting women's colleges began to spring up. Some

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of these emphasized education to support the traditional homemaker role. Others, such as a number of fine women's colleges that have survived to the present time, endeavored to develop women's intelligence both for their own sakes and for the sake of society. During the period of its strongest influence, the Women's Suffrage Movement also actively fostered higher education for women.

After women graduated from baccalaureate programs, some chose to enter graduate studies. Throughout the twentieth century, the number of women enrolled in graduate studies has increased with the general rise in population and educational level in the United States. Social and economic factors have influenced shifts in proportions of women engaged in graduate study during different periods of this century. (Rossi, 1973, pp. 515-516) In the 1920's, for instance, about 16 percent of the earned doctorates went to women. In 1945, when many men but relatively few women were away at war, women earned 20.4 percent of the doctorates. In 1954, the proportion of women who received doctorates fell to 9 percent as veterans (mostly male), subsidized by the United States government, returned to school. Throughout the present century, varying proportions of women have attained doctorates in different fields. For reasons too numerous to detail, higher proportions of women became psychologists, for instance, than physicists or chemists. The majority (about 80 percent) entered academic life.

The 1970's marked a number of phenomena that bear upon academic women in the United States. From 1969 to 1980 the percentage of women faculty in colleges and universities increased from 19 percent to

26 percent. (McDaniels, 1980) Throughout the 1970's the majority of women faculty members served at two- and four-year colleges, were found more frequently than men at lower academic ranks, and received lower salaries than they. However, women's publication records, a major criterion used for academic appointment and advancement, also tended to be thinner than those of men. This difference is at least partly attributable to women's placement, more frequently than men, in settings that involve relatively heavy teaching schedules. A blind or anonymous review policy adopted by many professional journals has helped to reduce the publication differential somewhat. In some places, moreover, (Loeb & Ferber, 1973, p. 246) women with fairly recent Ph.D.s are publishing more than men in corresponding positions.

Fair hiring policies generally widened the range of women's faculty appointments during the 1970's. However, extension of fairness to tenure, promotion, and retention of academic women has often been problematic and is currently being challenged in a number of institutions. Ironically, some of the very institutions that from their beginnings have been and continue to be most supportive of women scholars, such as the four-year Catholic liberal arts college for women at which I teach, have witnessed a striking decline in proportion of women faculty members during the 1970's. However, women are now leavening a wider range of academic life in the United States than was evident some years ago.

Overall, the 1970's marked a number of advances, nationally and world-wide, that concern academic women. (Sweet, 1979) For the first time in this country's history, women became presidents of two major

universities during that decade. In 1979 all Seven Sisters colleges had women presidents. Outside the United States, England opened its prestigious Rhodes Scholar program to women. Internationally, the United Nations declared 1975 the Year of the Woman and marked 1976-1985 a decade devoted to Women, Equality, Development, and Peace. In 1978 the number of women students beginning college exceeded the number of men. However, in spite of modest advances and noteworthy exceptions, the wealth of talent residing in women has been insufficiently tapped.

The development of women's talents, with attendant reduction of impoverishment of academic life, could profit from evidence on alterable factors, such as women's self-esteem and attitudes of people (besides the woman herself) who are present in their lives. Although the predominantly correlational, retrospective, or otherwise tenuous (e.g., because of absence of control groups) findings on these topics sometimes make interpretation difficult if not hazardous, they provide a valuable description of major factors related to women's academic achievement. Informal observations that I have made during twenty years' teaching at a women's college may also clarify some of the alterable factors.

In self-esteem, two groups of women, professional people and educated homemakers, ranging in age from 36 to 46, showed the following differences: (1) 54 percent of the professional women but only 14 percent of educated homemakers experienced self-esteem at the highest level (good to very good); and (2) 31 percent of the educated homemakers but only 4 percent of the married and 15 percent of the single profes-

sional women experienced self-esteem at the lowest level. The relatively high self-esteem of the majority of professional women appears noteworthy, especially since self-esteem influences the quality of personal activity. (Birnbaum, 1975) It must be remembered, however, that since relatively few women have been able to develop their talents to the degree that professional (including many academic) women have been able to do, curtailment of the talents of their sisters may find expression in lower self-esteem.

Closely related to findings on self-esteem are comments of contemporary psychologists. Florence Denmark, in her presidential address to the American Psychological Association, remarked: ". . . when women project themselves as competent . . . they are likely to be perceived as such." (1980, p. 1065) Diana Baumrind also found that a sense of personal efficacy, that is, seeing oneself as responsible and capable, contributes greatly to the development of competence. (1972, p. 170)

Supportive presence of persons besides themselves is also associated with women's pursuing academic careers. Various studies have implicated encouraging fathers, competent working mothers, and friends, teachers, and advisers, especially other women. (Barnett & Baruch, 1975, pp. 31-34; Douvan, 1976; Frieze, 1978, chap. 12; Tidball, 1976, 1980) My informal observations of former students who have achieved a Ph.D. or an advanced professional degree, compared with equally-talented peers who stopped their formal education with a baccalaureate degree, testify that a supportive family most frequently distinguishes the two groups.

The presence of other women in the academic environment as it relates to women's achievement has been the focus of additional research (Tidball, 1976, 1980) and interpretation. (Douvan, 1976) Tidball found that graduates of women's colleges are more frequently cited in professional directories and in references such as Who's Who of American Women than are women who graduated from other places. Controlling economic and intellective factors, she reported that twice as many graduates of highly-selective women's colleges attained noteworthy achievement than was evidenced among women graduates of equally-selective coeducational colleges. She also found an impressive relationship between proportion of women faculty members to number of women students and later achievement. Although correlational data do not establish whether a causal relationship exists, Tidball makes an imaginative suggestion, based on the relationship that she found: the environment of women's colleges ought to be investigated thoroughly. Doing so may provide a bridge to understanding how factors in the educational environment contribute to achievement. In this vein, the Women's College Coalition (1981) recently completed a study of some facets of the educational environment in women's colleges, an environment largely created and designed by women. Although persons not familiar with such educational settings might fear that good balance in personality would suffer thereby, this fear is not founded on fact. Remarks of a developmental psychologist (Douvan, 1976) who was herself a graduate of a women's college provide further credence to Tidball's observations and suggestion.

At the graduate level, too, the presence of women is related to the academic development of students. For instance, Goldstein (1979) found that graduate students who had had advisers of the same sex as they, showed greater accomplishment (measured by publication record four years after achieving a Ph.D.) than did the remaining students.

No one possesses a crystal ball that could infallibly project the future of academic women (with repercussions for us all) in the 1980's. Moreover, historians warn that a single unknown factor could completely change a predicted course of events. Some will claim that factors, such as projected financial reductions or decrease in numbers of college and university students, forebode a bleak future. As one writer commented, "In a cutback economy, equality loses." (Bancroft, 1980, p. 122) A moderate projection, with provisos, may be best. These provisos include:

1. Continuation of efforts to eliminate conscious or unconsciously-expressed forms of injustice that curtail the development of women's talents and contributions to higher education. This proviso carries with it considerable challenge that ranges from the early education of children, to situations in which academic women, unable to find adequate child care, for instance, may feel constrained to abandon their careers. One report (Graham, 1970, p. 1290) notes that women with Ph.D.s in the United States consider provision of adequate domestic assistance their greatest career-related problem.

2. Appropriate inclusion of women in expressions of language. Since ideas expressed through language affect thinking and inform action, this dimension is more commonly recognized as significant now than had even been imagined a few years ago. Continuance of efforts that address this issue is needed.

3. Thorough assessment of factors associated with becoming academic women. Although identification of a number of related factors has already been addressed, attempts to discover how they contribute to lives of academic women have scarcely begun.

4. Continued encouragement of women to pursue academic careers. Especially now, as increasing numbers of experience-rich, non-traditional women students are entering college, society could well discover in them the tremendous resources they bring for strengthening higher education. Simultaneously the development of such talent will enrich the lives of the women themselves.

If these provisos are followed, I am hopeful that the numbers, proportions, and expressions of talent of women in academic life will increase by 1990. Women will exercise greater responsibilities commensurate with their talents, a result beneficial to the entire human community. Perhaps by 1990 women will generally have discovered for themselves what Simone de Beauvoir, (1953, pp. 728-729) envisioned some years ago, that:

> . . . liberty can break the circle . . . let woman be given resporsibilities and she is able to assume them . . .
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> . . .

it remains only for women to continue their ascent, and the successes they are obtaining are an encouragement for them to do so. It seems almost certain that sooner or later they will arrive at complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis.

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